

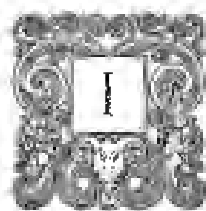
THE POT-HUNTERS

BY

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ILLUSTRATED FROM DRAWINGS BY MARTIN JUSTICE



HAD finished the sporting sheet and impatiently awaited the first pages with the war news, but Kink feeds upon written language temperately and with apparent languor; picking it apart, line from line, like a girl eating shoe-string potatoes with her fingers. When I had re-read for a third time all about the victory of the American track team eight weeks before, and was deep in the "Gossip of the Fighters," he finished. We traded halves gravely, for the first spring newspaper is more precious than fine gold, and lends itself neither to jest nor laughter.

It was considerably later that he brandished his pink sheet meditatively.

"What kind of a jack-pot did these foot-racers win, hey?"

"Prizes, do you mean?" questioned I. "Why, they don't sprint for money; they're amateurs. They compete for sport."

Followed a discourse on athletics which he interrupted.

"Don't talk to me about sport; I know it all. Mebbe it's news to you, but I am the human handbook on runnin', an' I promulgates the maxim that necessity is the father of foot-racin'! I s'pose you never heard about Mojave Mike Butters, none to speak of, did you?"

"Certainly!" said I, "an old time pro. He was a pot-hunter."

"Well, him an' me has harvested more goods an' chattels through the bertin' proclivities of the American public than any pair of sportsmen west of Wall Street. His case'll p'int my illustration, I reckon, namely an' to wit: in order to do anything right well, a man has got to have a consumin' motive, like hunger, or marriage, or some sim'lar kind of fright."

Outside the bunk-house, the drip of spring snows told of the coming clean-up, while the soft mountain twilight invited reminiscence.

"I was range ridin' for the 'C Circle R,' an' one day comin' back from the foot-hills I jumped up the ondecenest party I ever see disfiggerin' of nature's perspective. He wore knee panties an' a undershirt without no sleeves. Furthermore, he walked bare-headed, barelegged, an' barefoot, carryin' in his hands a pair of dancin' pumps with spikes in the soles. It ain't conventional to flush up no such aspects twenty mile out in the sage-brush, an' the pinto tore up something fierce.

"How!" says I, peelin' up track to see if somebody was bringin' his trunk.

"He didn't retort nothing relevant; just as't for my knife. I give it to him, an' he begin manicurin' cactus thorns out of his feet.

"Bime by I cl'ared my throat.

"Nothin' is more repulsive to my nature than vulgar cur'osity," says I, "but I deem all precedents is busted by the sight of a man in a bathin'-suit wadin' through a cactus flat with his hands full of shoes. You have upset the processes of reason in me, complete. Be you a crip with some newfangled lung cure, or is these clues the car an' foot marks of a nimble "get-away"? If the latter, I begs pardon and passes by its animatin' motives without interest, as befitin' a gentleman. If the former, I pines to know more of the treatment an' if it's too impulsive to permit of a man's shoein' hisself."

"I'm afraid of bastin' a spike on these rocks," says he; "there ain't another pair west of Denver." An' havin' chinopped sufficient, he stood up.

"I got a real Bertillion of him then, an' the evidence sure tore into the invalid hypothesis, for he loomed up terrible deep in the

chest an' bulky about the boosum. When he tiptoed across the road, his calves stood out lean an' stringy, an' them shameless pantalettes showed leg muscles veined like the flanks of a quarter-hoss. Altogether, he looked to need an open-air treatment 'bout as urgent as I hungered for a hossback ride, havin' cantered forty mile since day.

"Gentle stranger," I emits, 'maybe you're plenty buxom in the legs, but your speech is plainly feeble an' limp'. As for me, I am that far lost to all sense of shame that I asks right out: who are you, what is them cock-fightin' slippers for; an' how come you flauntin' your unblushin' nekkedness before the virgin face of me an' Montana?"

"Them's my runnin' shoes," says he. "I'm Mojave Mike, an' I can beat any man, woman, or child, fish, fowl, or foot-racer that inhabits the dry land, or lives outside of Kansas; for any sum or distance up to four hundred yards an' a like total of dollars; flyin' start; money at the tape. I might say further that I am the hind quarters an' workin' capital of a scheme for the invigoration of the sportin' instinct in small towns. The other an' forra'd half of the sketch comprises Rev. Martin Luther Worthy, of Binghamton, New York, who's on ahead with the "Holy Land on a Bicycle"; seven hundred views; an' all the latest song successes. He instigates Y. M. C. A.'s for a main line, an' looks over the ground for me as a side graft.

"I got a letter from him at Pocatello, sayin' that the town of Little River wallered in the belief that it had a sprinter. Along with an' added to this asset, the village now has my clothes an' three hundred an' forty dollars in side bets belongin' to me an' that earnest Christian worker, Dr. Worthy. Them mournful numbers explains this display of my unseemly charms that you alluded at."

"So ye bet your whole roll, clothes an' all," says I, 'an' instead of emergin' garnished with the proud flesh of vic'try, you found the feller could run some after all, eh?"

"Naturally this here epic is good readin' to me, an' I hungers for more.

"He snorts like the pinto.

"Run? I could give him a start, beat him out, an' be hid before he'd finish. They jobbed me! They're crooked! I'm wise to most every graft, an' when it comes to havin' the bunk handed to me, I'm the

armless wonder of the museum — I ain't got hands to receive it; but these fakers laid the goldbrick in my lap while my hands was busy. They're thieves! Run? He's hamstrung, I tell you."

"Bein' as I could have heard him plain if I'd been hull down below the sky-line, I judges that Mr. Mike had antipathies to his treatment, an' from his tale I don't wonder that sorrow gnawed at his innards.

"It seems he'd wandered into Little River an' got a job as a painter. When he'd been there a week he let out kind of chesty that he was awful fast on his feet.

"It didn't take no time to get his money placed. The village star of hope was a college youth named Mulveyhill, whose pa was mayor of the town.

"The race come off at a picnic the morning I rides onto the scene, an' as near as I could make it out, Mojave had let the boy run close to him in hopes of gettin' another race later on. The judges was holdin' the tape at the finish, an' what did one of 'em do when he see Mike leadin' by six inches, but drop the string before either man touched, an' yell:

"Mulveyhill wins!"

"He had fifty on the college boy himself.

"When things was right at their worst, a stranger tips him off to the multitude as Mojave Mike Butters, the pot-hunter, an' claims he'd seen him beat the state champion at Pocatello, usin' sim'lar wiles, only at that time Mike was a miner by name of Jimson. This here Judy Iscariot had lost a hundred on the exhibit.

"These discrepancies sort of fanned the feelin's of the populace into a kind of enthusiasm. Foot-racin' seemed to have got into their systems. They craved further exhibitions of his speed, an' they follered him three mile across the prairie, afoot an' hossback, through cactus an' sage-brush, till their cravin's was assuaged.

"I never did get all the straight of the obsequies, for Mike gets loose from his language whenever he comes to the indignities of this epoch.

"Pardner!" says I, when he concluded, 'eight mile over yonder is our outfit. I've got a war-bag in the bunk-house with more or less of a troosoo therein. The overhalls ain't been pressed recent, nor there ain't no raised silk monograms on the jumper sleeves, but it'll keep you from mauraudin' over the

welkin in your goose-flesh a-debauchin' the morals of livestock, this-a-way. Moreover, I has forebodin's of a back payroll to the extent of thirty-four dollars, the which I deems it a relaxation to split with you. Is it a go?"

"We have wasted too much time in idle chatter," says he. "Let us advance by rushes on the thirty-four."

"Somehow I was drawn to this stranger from the first; his methods was that open an' refined."

"On the way over he reverts to the thirty-four subject again."

"How foolish to toil for a niggardly stipend," he says, "when every hamlet supports a pterodactyl who hugs the delusion that he can run, an' is willin' to further the conceit by wagers. There's fortunes in foot-racin'!"

"Doubtless," I interrupts, gazin' at his white meat, all cactus scratched, "but after the horrible example of pot-huntin' prosperity which you presents, I ain't really hungerin' for none of it — not personally."

"All the game needs is a lookout," says he. "If you an' me was hooked up double with that thirty-four dollars, we could go back to Little River an' clean 'em out slick er'n bass-wood bark. We'd quit the place with money in every pocket, an' plenty of pockets."

"Strikes me that some other town further on might lend itself to pillage just as easy," says I, "bein' as you're so well known an' abominated there, so to speak."

"No, sir-ee! I had an uncle back in Arkansas, that got flimmed on a boss deal onct, an' when he found it out he called at the party's house with his shot-gun."

"Where's Bill?" he inquires of the gent's wife.

"He's 'listed an' gone to the war," she says.

"Thank yo' ma'am," says he, shoulderin' his weapon an' commencin' to tramp back an' forth, "I'll wait for him."

"That's me. I'm goin' to wait fer them Little Rivulets." An' with that he unfolds a scheme which for plumb legitimate frenzied finance had the U. S. Steel an' Shipwreckin' deals looking like a game of old maid for hairpins.

"It has allus been a religion with me that the circ'latin' medium should circ'late, an' it has been my earnest effort to become a full-growed artery therefor. When I'd

heard him through, I stood good for him at the ranch, an' the foreman put him on."

"Well, the next day I rode over to Little River an' had a long pow-wow with a barber I knowed. He said he didn't have the dope, but he could get it in Denver by writin', which he done."

"I never seen such a change as there was in Mojave when I got through landscape-gardenin' of him. The oxhide stuff bleached him out till he was yaller as a dance-hall daisy. It was plumb startlin' to see him grow pallid. Altogether it took 'bout a month to get him Swedified proper an' for his mustache to grow, but, as it happened, him an' me was camped over in the Red River flats, with a bunch of yearlin's, where he wasn't bothered."

"We got in line and rode the cayuses back an' forth across the flat till we wore a smooth trail through the grass, 'bout two foot wide an' two hundred yards long. Then every evenin' we'd line out for this stadium, him in his spikes an' panties, me with my Colt's. He'd scrouch down an' stomp his feet into the dirt, while I'd yell:

"On your marks! Git set! Bang!" an' he'd beat the echo out of range. We lived an' slept an' et foot-racin'. I dreamed about 'starts' an' 'strides' an' 'take-offs' an' such."

"He could run, all right, all right. He had to. Talk about your amatoors that sprint for sport — this party had learned to run or starve, as a boy, an' had never forgot how. Why, say, when he tore hisself loose from a vicinity, it seemed like the whole landscape was crippled. I used to try him out by givin' him a start an' shootin' at him. If he beat the bullet, we figgered he was up to form, but if the lead overtook him, we'd call it an off-day an' underload the ca'tridges. I've seen him scare a jack-rabbit up till it was workin' under forced draught, then limp up to it from behind an' kind of yawn an' stretch, an' then goad it to wake up or else get off the trail an' let somebody run that knowed how."

"Well, when we broke training, he pointed out direct for Little River, while I rode back to the camp an' drewed out of the stock business our wages aggravatin' the stupefyin' total of seventy-eight dollars."

"When I got into town I found him turnin' faro in the 'Ophir' on the swing shift. He'd got a job the first clatter, an' made as

fine a golden-haired cherub as ever robbed a church; different entire from Mojave Mike Butters, who had a mane like the cover of a hair sofa. This blondifyin' seemed to gentle him a heap, too, for he bore up under the burden of 'Curley Terwilliger,' the which sounds to me like some Eastern cuss word.

"That evenin', conversation in the 'Ophir' turned to foot-racin'.

"Which, though not dependent on same for no livelihood," says Curley, "when it comes to runnin' I might lay claim to bein' present with bells — in a strickly amatoor way, of course."

"Might you be wedded to such a theory to any extent?" inquires a bystander.

"Well, yes! I am shore cinched up considerable to the predilection that I ain't no worm on my feet," says Curley. "Not that I ever ran much since I was a boy in Fredonia, Kansas, but in them days I was a wonder at pris'ners' base an' town ball, an' I ain't wind-broke nor blemished none, to this day. I wouldn't mind reskin' a few stingy pesos on my alacrities; just enough to remove the contest out of the disreppitable realms of church raffles an' such snares."

"We has a tender youth who ain't so ossified around the limbs as the rest of us, an' I am minded to place fifty dollars on him if he'll run," resumes the speaker, who, I finds out, is the party that helped job Mike the time previous; Briggs, by name.

"You're on," says Mike. "Trot out your prodigy any day, an' I'll scratch dust in his eyes. Moreover, I delegates Mr. Martin here, of the "C Circle R," as stake-holder. He's a stranger to me, but he looks good an' disinterested." So I am selected to that important position. Later on, Mike covers another twenty-five dollar bet; then, seein' as our pile is all in, he declines further wagers.

"This ain't no get-rich-quick scheme," says he. "I am utilitarian in my instincts from the concrete up, an' I'd a heap rather see this town flourish like the Green Bay, Wis. tree of fiction than be withered by the frost of adversity, as would shorely happen if it coppered me on the tan-bark. This velocity exhibit is goin' to be an educational divertissement with no motive but the upliftin' of the masses an' the greatest good to the greatest number."

"About ten o'clock the next morning, Curley sneaks out onto the prairie back of

the 'Ophir' an' begins shakin' the kinks out of his legs, unostentatious. I'm watchin' him from a back winder, along with most of the sportin' element, an' it is pitiful to see how he has walked into the jaws of the gamblin' vice. It looked like a mud-turtle could give him the run of his life.

"Lord!" says a bystander, "my gran'-mother is raisin' eighty-four next month, but I'm tempted to back her agin that tin-horn for a hundred yards. If she can't run rings around him, carryin' her knittin' with her, then I'm a louse."

"He ain't much like Butters, that professional we had last July, is he?" says another.

"Good thing for him," the crowd murmurs, kind of somber an' darkly forebodin' — "we don't stand for no pot-hunters in this town."

"What do you think of this salmon-tipped gambler, Mr. Martin?" they questioned.

"Bein' interested soley an' strickly in a official capacity," I replies, gazin' gravely out to where Curley has his pants rolled up, straddlin' about with symptoms of locomotive ataxia, "I bears the laurels to the victor, that's all."

"That night, Briggs brings up the subject again.

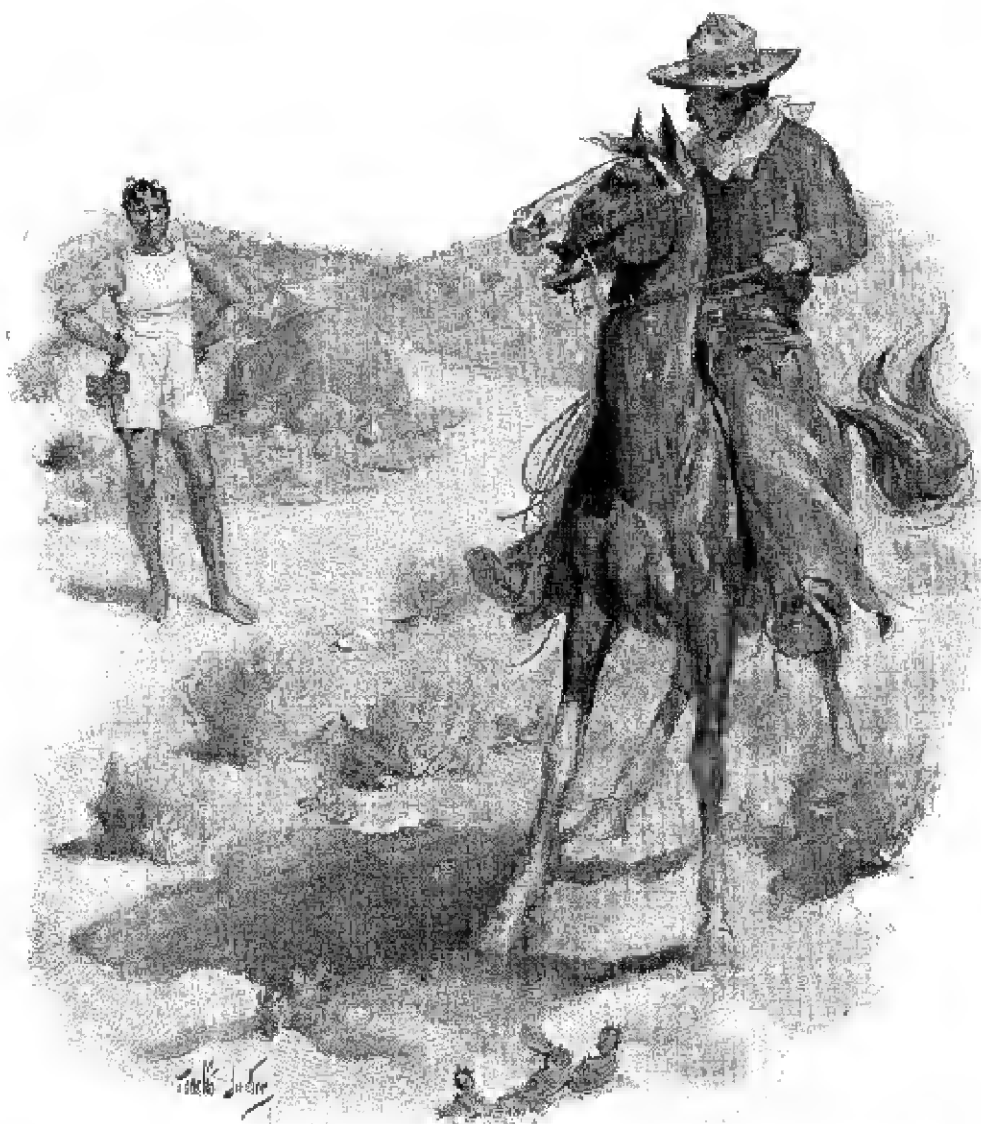
"Did the rejuvenation of them laig muscles inspire you with any more confidence, Mr. Terwilliger?"

"Them are the suitablest words for my symptoms," says Curley. "Havin' seen how my limbs retains their Fredonia freshness, if this here match wasn't primarily a work of charity on my part, I would certainly overcome my repugnance to a cinch, an' insulate these purlieus from any redundancies of cash that might pain 'em."

"Don't let no chivalry to these environs interfere with your natural depravity," says Briggs. "I have a hundred dollars which has growed moldy under the hearthstone. Mebbe we can put it in circ'lotion."

"Sure!" says Mike. "Your kind indulgence, Mr. Martin"; so I pockets the bet, likewise, two more for twenty-five each, which runs us up to our limit again.

"The game worked so easy that I begin to like the place an' the profession, but with prosperity comes that cravin' of nature that has to be satisfied. We got full, an' filled the floatin' pop'lotion of Little River likewise. Nothin' ribald an' frivolous — just a plain New-England-boiled-dinner kind



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of a jag — made up of the necessities, like ‘sky’ an’ gin an’ bitters. There wasn’t no valenciennes nor point-lace frills to this tear in the way of busted bar-fixtures an’ all that. Of course, Curley spent the money, as it would never do for the stake-holder to frivol nothin’ away, thereby arousin’ gossip.

“We was kippered for two days, an’ seein’ him bust trainin’ that-a-way, the sports got ravenous for more of his money. We took all bets up to our limit, an’ done the same the next night, only gettin’ twice as much each night, of course. We kept doublin’ up for several days till the impression got out that this new faro dealer was filthy with the spoils.

“How could we do it with only seventy-eight dollars to start with? Why, simple enough. All we *needed* was a start. We bet seventy-five the first night, which give us a hundred an’ fifty to bet the next, an’ three hundred the next, an’ so forth, only it didn’t hold up this pleasin’ ratio, because we paid cash for the few things we craved, thus cuttin’ down the sum total to reasonable proportions, an’ easy to handle. When I get to fondlin’ too big money, I grow dizzy an’ gaze down on mundane affairs from a great height. I get a contempt for the vulgarities of life such as honest work an’ the cost of articles; I ignores ‘em complete.

"I don't recall such another eary of high-proof lickers an' high-priced livin' in my whole repertory, while the report that this Mulveyhill biped was trainin' for the race filled us with a great an' consumin' mirth.

"Curley nailed all bets which showed their heads, and we entered into the gamblin' areeny, too, at least I did; played 'bank' durin' my wakin' hours. I had mighty poor luck at it; seemed like I couldn't win. I found out, one day, that the game was a 'brace' an' it made me awful sore to think I had fell amongst crooks.

"A few days before the race, I follers the crowd over to gaze pityin'ly on the Mulveyhill invalid out for his airing, an' when I had done so, I felt like I'd clutched with both hands onto the sag in a trolley wire. I didn't note no tracks of a wheeled chair goin' out, an' when I got there, instead of seein' a hundred-pound college boy, totterin' down the track with a cigarette in his mouth, my eyeballs was seared onto a party about six foot long, all dyked out in dinky pants an' spike shoes like Mike's. Moreover, he was lean, like a race hoss, an' as musc'lar as dogmeat. He had a heavy jaw an' an eye like the flash of a bowie, an' even though he was a head taller than Mike, he handled hisself like a bantam.

"Just as I got placed, 'Crack!' went the starter's gun for a try-out.

"Gentlemen! The mild-Key-West-two-for-a-dollar bow-sprit in my face turned flat an' tasteless, an' I realized that this here world is a deceitful, unfeelin' vale. That man faded away like a mist, that's all. When he whizzed off, the sod tore out in hunks at every stride, an' he made a buzzin' sound in the air, the pitch of which kept gettin' higher, the further he went.

"'He'll make Mike look like he's runnin' backwards,' thinks I, an' the desire grewed on me coldly, of a sudden, to do some urgent bookkeepin' an' strike a trial balance.

"It calc'lated up that I was involved on the debit side of the populace of Little River to the extent of eight hundred an' forty-five dollars. If they won I'd be called on for sixteen hundred an' ninety Kopecks, V. D. Q. As assets for the performance of these covenants, I had three hundred an' thirty in coin of the realm, the balance havin' been doled out for necessities durin' the week. I ain't no lightnin' calc'lator, but it didn't take me a minute to get the right answer to this problem, viz., the difference in them

quantities divided by the result of this foot-race made a lynchin', as clear as day, an' a lynchin' in which I might claim an interest. I proved an' reproved the example, but the quotient was the same every time.

"As I gazed out to the west'ard, the purple foot-hills beckoned to me. Up beyond I seen the main range, cool, mysterious, an' what was better, trackless. Before I realized it, I was sa'nterin' toward the outskirts of that benighted village, bearin' a heavy heart an' a look of innocence. A camp that growed ostriches like the monster I'd just quit was no place for an honest man, an' I planned to shift my game to other lands. It made me shiver to think what a pit of iniquity I had avoided. No doubt the foot-racin' game would go great in some places, an' I judged Mike an' me could do well elsewhere—say at some sanitarium, or a One-legged Soldiers' Home—but we was plainly out-classed here.

"I hadn't gone thtee hundred yards before the town marshal tapped my snap.

"'You'll oblige by omittin' any constitootionals outside the town limits till after the races, Mr. Martin,' says he, overtakein' me. 'No offense, mind, but the boys has delegat-ed me as body-guard an' guide to you; just to show you around an' keep you from gettin' confused as to directions, also to prevent any trees from fallin' on you.'

"Bein' as there wasn't a rose-bush in forty mile, I seen that his fallin' timber simile was most apt an' pleasin'. Therefore, we sa'ntered back down the main street, arm in arm, boilin' over an' runnin' down the sides with mutual esteem an' confidence.

"I hunts up Mike.

"'We're agin it,' says I.

"'You're crazy,' he answers.

"'Not crazy, just unfortunate. Listen to this! There's only one man in the whole world that can outrun you. I meet up with you nekked, in the underbrush, an' am inveigled into backin' your play. I puts up all my coin, an' lo! We draws that fast runner, the first clatter. Again, you stand to lose nothin' in this race but your breath, an' a little ground, while I am goin' to part absolute from both breath an' ground, if signs don't fail.'

"'What do you mean?'

"'Well, this angleworm can outrun the Morse Code, an' my books don't balance, there bein' a triflin' discrepancy of thirteen hundred an' some odd dollars.'

"Don't worry!" says he, "I'll beat him. It's as easy as kickin' a lamb in the face. He's an amatoor; I'm a professional. He runs for sport; I run for grub. I've got to win. Why, I've laid awake nights gloatin' over the thoughts of doin' unto them what they done unto me last summer."

"Well, his talk chirked me up considerable, though I growed awful nervous as the time approached.

"I s'pose the total census of Little River dreened off to the fair grounds the day of the race, an' it seemed like they'd all got some kind of a bet on Mulveyhill.

"In them days foot-races wasn't started with no gun-shot like they are now, because there wasn't no runners philanthropic enough to take chances on the starter bein' friendly to the other side an' allowin' his man to beat the gun. No, they used the old-time professional start. That is, they jockeyed back of the scratch, runnin' up to it together, but the race wasn't started till both men had crossed the line. In other words, neither one had to start till he figgered he

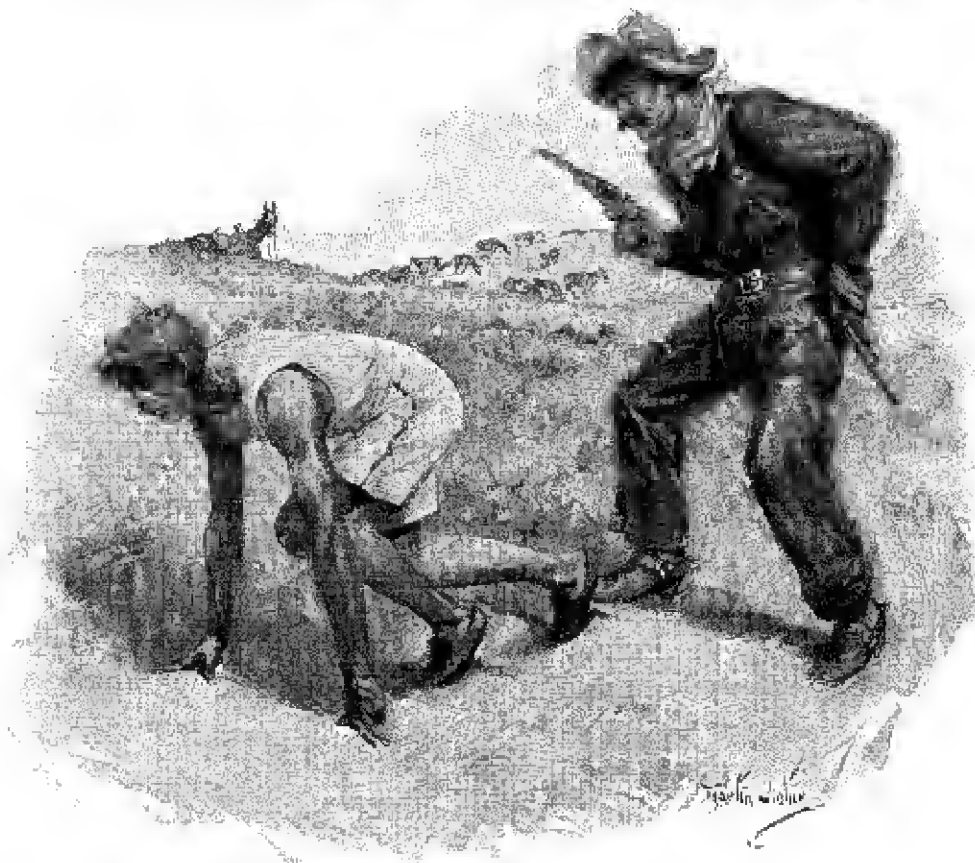
had a shade the best of it, an' as there was no time limit set, they could fiddle as long as they wanted to.

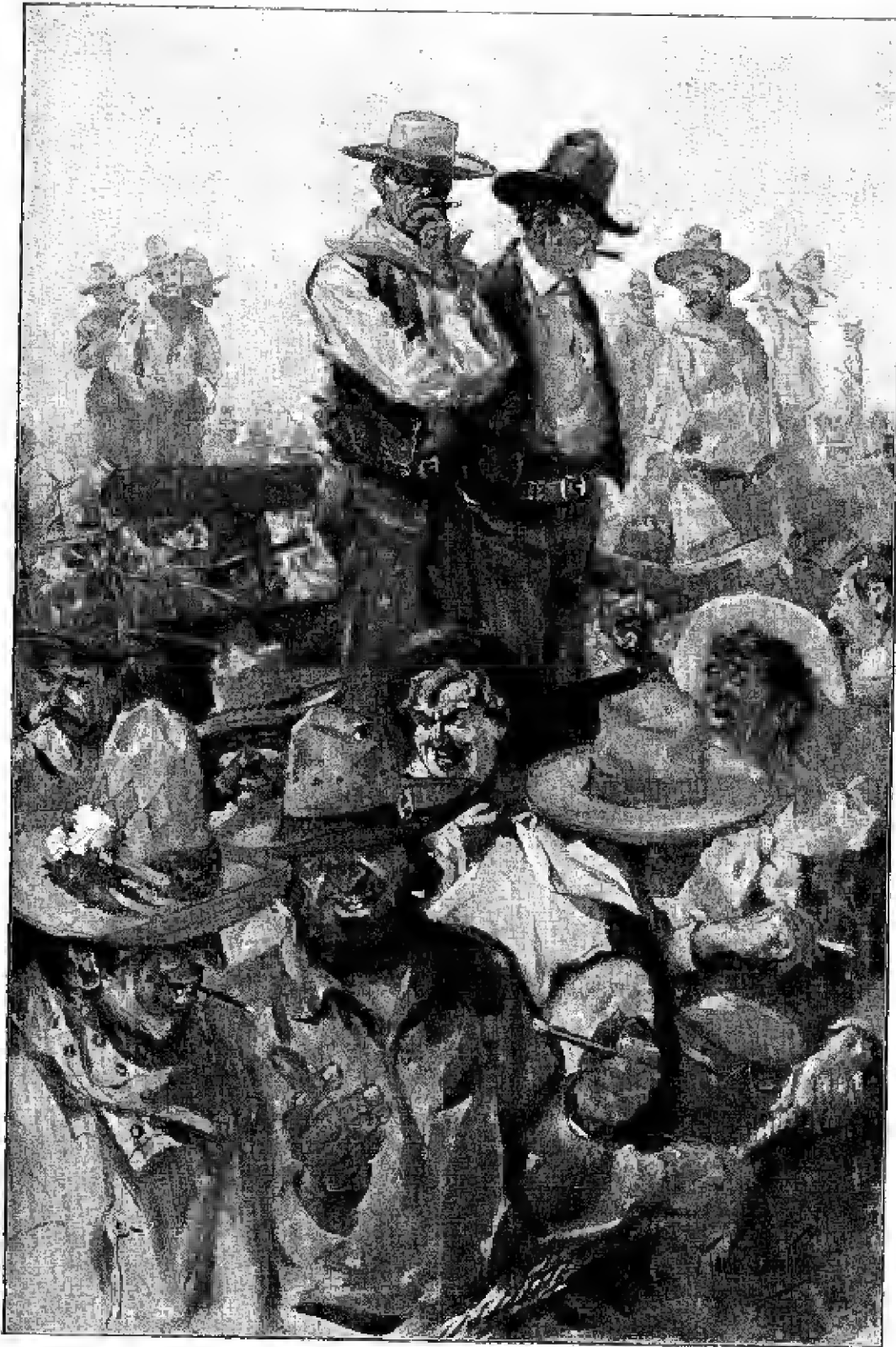
"There was a bunch of buckboards an' ranch wagons near the finish, an' the committee seen that I got foot room on a buggy seat right clost to the tape, where I was easy prey for the winners. I seen Briggs eyein' me scroop'lous, while the marshal stood handy to thrust hisself between me an' danger or temptation.

"I near fell off when I gazed into the eye of that mob, an' realized how my bank roll stacked. They all had bristly whiskers, an' yaller teeth, an' suspicions of me, apparently, while as for milk of human kindness, them pastures was dry as Death Valley. This episode had snuck out of the comedy field an' was wallerin' hock deep in the blackest kind of tragedy.

"S'posin' Mike casts a shoe, or busts a blood-vessel, or goes crazy with the heat?' I thinks. All of which catastrophies looms up, of a sudden, not only horrible, but plumb imminent an' impending, so that I'

"On your marks! Git set! Bang!" an' he'd beat the echo out of range"





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goes spineless an' soggy like a paper bag full of sour milk. I dassent show symptoms of these impendin' dissolutions, however, 'cause the marshal has his cold, unfeelin' eye on me constant; therefore, I prays for stiff knees so that I don't wobble overboard, squash down, an' mush out all over the ground. Scared! Oh, no! I wasn't horrified, nor hopeless, nor aghast. Them words is feeble an' senseless, an' language shrivels all up over feelin's like mine. They has to be endured to be appreciated, an' few has the constitootion to endure 'em. To make matters harder, I was up in full view an' bass-relief where those who run might read, as it were.

"Just when I diagnosed the worst, a yell streamed out of that ravenin' wolf-pack that shoved over the magnetic pole about three degrees. I thought it was my blood they hungered for till I seen Mulveyhill trot down the track to limber up.

"The college man has on his runnin' pants an' a sweater with a whackin' big letter on the front — most likely his initial — an' all over him is medals an' break-a-brack to burn. To hear 'em, you'd think that assembly had mortgaged the fillin's in their teeth on that lad, while Mike never got a hand as he come out. He looked to be fat an' soft, compared to the amatoor, an' moreover he kind of loafed around like he didn't recognize the importance of his lines. The boy was keyed up like a fiddle-string; on his toes an' prancin'; but Mike just slopped about like he'd been robbed of his sleep, the which was such fine comedy to me that I begin my prayers fervent.

"Too much wood-alcohol an' bitters in that yaller-hammer," says a party as Mike trots by. "He's too strong a booze-fighter to run fast."

"He'll blow up in fifty yards, sure pop," says another. "Wish I had a twenty case note on it."

"First time up to the mark the youngster beat Mike over by a yard. I never see a man so sudden at startin'; he didn't run; he just occurred here and there. Of course, my pardner stopped short of the scratch, an' the other one come back. It tickled the crowd, though, an' they begin guyin' Mike, while I went gropin' for a Scriptural verse. It seemed like a little singin' an' a few words to the bereaved was about due, but all I could recall was 'The Battle of B'lin' Water,' so I wore out the first verse of that.

"They tried again, an' it was worse'n ever; he led by five feet, greatly to the frenzy of the populace.

"What'll he do to Mike when he starts to run?" thinks I, while the sweat oozed out of my shoes.

"At the third try he left Mojave like he was crucified, an' I see Mike's teeth showin' as if he was about to bite. He's a hothead, anyhow, an' I could most hear the ivory grindin' in his rage. I don't reckon he'd ever been out-jockeyed that-a-way before, an' what with the crowd growin' personal, he lost his dip.

"I'll run ye this time if ye beat me over by a rod," he growls.

"Say! That was apple tartlet *à la mode* for the Mulveyhill beast, an' with them words he left his mark like a shootin' star, Mike foammin' along six foot behind.

"Go!" screamed several million voices, an' I passed into a trance.

"Down between the lines of hungry faces they come, in a welterin', deafenin' tidal-wave of yells; heads up; hair streamin'; faces knit; two hundred-an' twenty yards, straightway.

"Gee! It was a wonderful race, for Mike et up them six long feet, an inch at a time. As he gained slowly, the yells of the bystanders quit till the thud of the runners' feet come out clear in the stillness. At the hundred-yard mark, the boy led by four foot.

"I lived twenty-eight or thirty years in the first fifteen seconds. Then truth flashed over me in a blindin' instant.

"MIKE COULDN'T CATCH HIM.

"At the hundred and fifty he'd picked up another foot, but there he stuck, for the kid was runnin' the race of his life. As they passed me, twenty yard from the tape, I seen Mulveyhill's face all distorted, an' set like clay, in the finishin' spurt; his nerves strained to the snappin' point. Mike was right at his shoulder, but anybody could see he didn't have no show on earth, when, of a sudden, he belched up the *awfullest* holler, right from his pants-band. It busted the silence like a cannon cracker, an' woke me out of my coma.

"If you ever heard a hoss scream in a burnin' stable, just wad that noise into a lump, shoot it out sudden, an' let it bust, an' you'll form some idy of what Mike coughed into the cultured ear of the college man.

"When I heard that scream of despairin' agony, I realized that the stuff was off,

entire, an' that the first law of nature hadn't never been repealed. I let go all holts an' done a back flip-flop out of the buckboard. I hit at half len'th, but at full speed, an' mowed a swath through them merry villagers. Out toward the golden west I started, in an air line for the mountains, eschewin' all subterfuges in the way of deviations.

"Stop him! There he goes! Halt!" I hears, an' with that I finds the law in Little River to be safeguarded copious.

"It felt like that marshal critter had fell

I doubled an' crow-hopped, but my lungs was bustin', an' the breath whistled back an' forr'ad through me like a hot wind through a Kansas corn-crib. My feet was heavy as divin' shoes, my legs was wobbly, an' then, without warnin', I blew up complete.

"Cross marks the spot where the body was found," thinks I, makin' a final rush, but I tripped an' was garnered in by a nigger. We bit an' growled an' gouged, while over us piled the ragin' hoi polloi, the tall, the short, the fat, the sliin, the lame, the halt, and the blind.



"I tossed him in the air an' charged the crowd, but they swarmed at me like timber-wolves."

on me from a great height. If I hadn't been there to check his fall, he'd have been killed. As it was, he made an awful mess out of the ground thereabouts, but there's something frightenin' about a get-away. Put the bravest man in the world to runnin', an' cowardice eats him alive. At first I didn't have no mania in partic'lar, but the second he nailed me, I got the stren'th of a buffalo. I tossed him in the air an' charged the crowd, but they swarmed at me like timber-wolves. As fast as I shook 'em loose, more come, till I fought blind an' rastlin'; kickin' an' buckin',

"They had to drive an' entry in to where I was imbedded, an' stope me out, but finally I was drug into the daylight, piece by piece, an' assembled all complete.

"The first man I spied was Mike. I say it now with pride, that beholdin' of him that-a-way, I cherished no malice. All I felt was a growin' ca'mness an' the chill of despair. He looked me over queer, from keelson to flagstaff. Then he *grinned*! Strange to note, I didn't hunger to kill him none. I was done with them earthly vanities. No doubt he'd done his best, poor feller.

"He opens his face still further.

"Come over to the hotel, an' we'll settle up," says he. "I 'most lost out!"

"It took several eons of time for them tidings to reach me, an' havin' been left at my address, they digested slow, but so it was.

"You see that screech of his'n done the work. It's a strange thing, but a man can strain hisself so tense that the least little thing, comin' unexpected, is liable to snap his nerve like a fiddle-string. Mike said he'd learned the trick from an Indian down in the Crow Nation, an' it seems that when he hollered in Mulveyhill's ear so fierce an' curdlin', it throwed the boy off, an' he wobbled. That was all — just that tiny break — for he interfered, an' then without warnin', his nerves smashed, an' he fell like there wasn't a bone in his body. When they picked him

up, he couldn't walk, an' he cried like a baby.

"Now this is the p'int of my story. You see Mike *had* to win, an' bein' a pro, he done so!

"Well, I stood glarin' at him with the flies buzzin' in an' out of my mouth, till it dawned on me, utter. I turned my head, stiff-like, an' took in my captors one by one, while honest indignation riz up an' strangled me. I throwed out my chest, an' shook myself, savage, hurlin' the guards right an' left.

"Loose me!" I roars in a voice of thunder. "This man's entitled to his money, an' I'm goin' to give it to him. Your foul play don't go with *me*! You can tear me limb from limb, but Kink Martin won't never betray his sacred trust!"